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# Arabia

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# NEGLECTED ARABIA.

April - June, 1908.

## THE PASSION PLAY AT BAHREIN.

DR. S. J. THOMS.

This is the tenth of Muharrem, the Mohammedan sacred month, the day on which Hussein, the grandson of the prophet Mohammed, was killed on the plains of their now sacred city, Kerbela, in A. D. 680.

In commemoration of this event a drama was written of which Sir Lewis Pelly says, "If the success of the drama is to be measured by the effect it produces upon the people for whom it is composed or upon the audiences before whom it is represented, no play has ever surpassed the tragedy known in the Moslem world as that of Hassan and Hussein. Matthew Arnold, in his Essays on Criticism, elegantly sketches the story and effect of this Persian Passion Play, while Macaulay's Essay on Lord Clive has encircled the Mystery with a halo of immortality."

I wish I might give you a review of this great play which by the Shiah sect of Islam (at least 15,000,000 people) is revered almost above the Koran.



SCENE IN THE PASSION PLAY, NEAR THE NEW MISSION HOUSE.

Sir Lewis Pelly has made an excellent translation of it in two large volumes, but even a brief review of it would be too lengthy for this paper.

Ali, the Prophet's cousin and adopted son, married his adopted sister, Fatimah, the only surviving offspring of Mohammed from his numerous marriages. A division occurred in Islam when, at Mohammed's death, Ali was prevented from becoming Caliph or Successor. He was not made Caliph until twenty-four years later at the death of Othman, the third Caliph. Ali was killed, as was his eldest son who succeeded him, and another dynasty of Caliphs was begun. Twenty years the district of Cufa, north of Busrah, rebelled and called Hussein Caliph. He was on his way to join the rebels when he was killed in rather a brutal manner, in memory of which, the above drama was written making Hussein the savior of all the world. The climax is reached in the scene of the "Resurrection" when Gabriel hands the keys of Paradise to Mohammed, saying that he shall be intercessor for his fellow creatures. Thereupon a distracted band of prophets headed by Abraham begs Mohammed to manage to save them. Jacob, more venturesome than the rest, endeavors to substantiate his claims to the high position of mediator; but the matter is soon settled. Gabriel appears, and addressing Hussein, speaks words of consolation, on which the whole fabric of the Shiah religion rests: "Permission has proceeded from the Judge, the Gracious Creator, that I should give into thy hand this key of intercession. Go then and deliver from the flames every one who has in his lifetime shed but a single tear for thee, every one who has in any way helped thee, everyone who has performed a pilgrimage to thy shrine, or mourned for thee, and everyone who has written tragic verses for thee. Bear each and all with thee to Paradise." Then the sinners (entering Paradise) say: "God be praised! by Hussein's grace are we made happy, and by his favor are we delivered from destruction. By Hussein's loving kindness is our path decked with roses and flowers. We were thorns and thistles, but are now made cedars owing to his merciful intercession."

For the last ten days in the Shiah quarters the people have spent their time in groups, wailing and beating their breasts, around a reader who has recited in a high monotone from the Passion Play. Today the burial of Hussein was acted out in vivid and gruesome detail, many of them cutting themselves with swords and daggers and then, with blood-besmeared bodies and clothing, have danced through the streets beating their chests and heads until, it is said, many fell down exhausted and some will probably die.

The people work themselves into a frenzy and are most fanatical

at these times. The day before the big day two factions of the Shiahhs quarrelled in the bazaar and several were badly wounded, so that an order was issued forbidding them to pass in procession through the crowded portion of the town.



SACRED MUHARREM PROCESSION IN FRONT OF MASON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL, BAHREIN.

The Persians are Shiahhs, but the ruling Sheikh and nearly all of the Arabs belong to the other large class of Mohammedans, the Sunnis. The Sunnis turn Muharrem into a time of feasting and rejoicing, claiming that on the tenth day the Lord created Adam and Eve, Heaven and Hell, the Pen, Fate, Life, and Death.

The tears and sorrow seem real and one would think that, if they could show such sorrow for the suffering of one whom they have never seen, they would be very mindful of the suffering of members of their own household, at least, but they do not put their sentiments into practice. They care more for their donkeys and camels than for the women and old people of their families. Only a few days ago I was called out to see an old woman who had been very badly burned and we have been going each day to treat her. Yesterday when we arrived we found her lying in the middle of the yard, and a neighbor said her people had put her out there to die and had been gone all day to a reading where they were beating their chests and weeping over the suffering of one they had never seen, with never a thought of the terrible suffering of this poor old woman in their own household.

They know not the God of Love. Are you and I doing our utmost to bring the knowledge of our God into their lives by our money, our prayers, or our example?

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## OUR PRIVATIONS.

MISS MINNIE WILTERDINK.

The picture a person forms in his imagination of new scenes or of a new life very seldom agrees with the actual facts. The new missionary very soon learns that anticipations are not realities and that there is usually disappointment in store; what was not expected is found to exist and what was expected is not.

Knowing that life in uncivilized, heathen lands means inconveniences, discomforts, hardships, self-denials, and, it may be, persecutions, the new recruit has endeavored to count the cost, and come with a firm resolve to endure these hardships as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Coming to the field, ready to bear with cheerfulness and grace all these expected hardships, the revelation of things as they are comes as a distinct surprise and it almost seems a disappointment to find there is so little of the disagreeable or the unpleasant to be endured, as far as personal comfort is concerned.

Speaking of the privations of missionary life, first thoughts generally turn to his physical discomforts, such as unattractive dwellings and surroundings, disagreeable food and drink, unpleasant sights and sounds, the trying climate, prevalence of sickness and disease, and a general lack of creature comforts. All of these exist in a greater or less degree, and particularly so for the pioneer. But as the years go by and the work progresses, improvements are constantly made. The interest of the friends at home in the physical welfare of their missionaries, their eagerness to lighten the burden, and their loving thoughtfulness to bring all possible sunshine and brightness into isolated lives, are constantly providing better things. Of this, the pleasant and commodious mission houses in Bahrein and Muscat are an evidence, and each year brings added comforts.

Further, the new missionary learns to adjust himself to new methods and ways of living, for, after all, our manner of living is but a surface matter. The things thought so necessary at home are, after a few denials, no longer deemed essential to happiness. And so, also, the absence of dear ones and friends, though it will ever remain a sacrifice, has its bright side. Distance cannot separate us from their love, interest, or prayers. These are with us every moment, to help and encourage us. And the new life brings new friendships, both in the mission circle and among the native helpers and the converts.

Then the work itself opens up new interests and activities, and a joy which can be realized only as it is experienced; and for every loss or sacrifice there is the fulfillment of the promise of the hundred-fold return to those who leave all for the sake of Christ and His Gospel.

A missionary does make sacrifices when obeying the call of the Master, and it would be neither wise nor honest to make light of or despise these. But judging from my own experience at home, we are so apt to think first of the material losses and self-denials, and the emphasis and sympathies are generally turned towards these. Some of the hardships and trials that we talk of and pray for at home do not exist, other comforts that we did have at home may be lacking. But, as a rule, some substitute is found that brings just as much contentment and enjoyment, and the things that cannot be had are not so many as to cause suffering or discomfort, and, if need be, we can forego them.

The picture I had formed of the life here has not agreed with the reality and many have been the pleasant surprises that have helped to make Arabia seem home-like. But it has also brought to me the realization of a loss, which we cannot understand while still at home.

What Christian surroundings and Christian influences mean to the spiritual life can only be learned by their absence, and this absence of all spiritual help or uplift in any thing around us is the greatest loss in the new home, and the need of it the most pressing. Perhaps there is no time when the lack of such help and encouragement is more felt, when the contrast between the emptiness here and the fullness at home is more striking, than on the Sabbath day. Here there is nothing in all we see and hear to draw our thoughts heavenward. Precious memories of what the day means at home, of its hallowed influences and blessings come back many times, and in spirit we often gather with those at home for worship and prayer. Just to meet with those of kindred interests and sympathies is an inspiration and encouragement; moreover, the daily association with fellow Christians to admonish, to warn, and to exhort, are all helps from which the missionary is largely debarred. All the inspiration and influence that is exerted to deepen or awaken the spiritual life must come from the mission circle itself, and this sometimes means a circle of one.

Cleanliness is most appreciated and most apparent when surrounded by filth, but, because so surrounded, the danger of becoming polluted is also greater. The purity of Christian living shines brightest when surrounded by the darkness of a false religion; to preserve that purity and brightness unceasing vigilance is necessary. Temptations do not grow less when one leaves home, but rather increase. In the

midst of so much that is evil and corrupt, it is harder to think of only what is pure and true; little faults creep in more easily because they seem so little and insignificant compared with the sin and darkness around. Besides there is no standard of morality, no ideal for nobler living, to be found outside of what we bring.

And it is for this side of the life here that we most need the prayers of the church, and that, as they plan and work for our comfort and happiness, our friends may not forget this greater need, so that nothing of these deadening influences may taint or mar the life that must be a constant witness or dim the light that must burn brightly to penetrate this darkness of sin.

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### VILLAGE TOURING IN BUSRAH.

MRS. M. C. VOGEL.

A few times in my life I had found out that there is nothing like taking the bull by the horns. After two weeks of being introduced to the people of Busrah, I cast about for a chance to enter among the Arabs in their homes. Therefore one bright morning Jasmine, our Bible-woman, and I went on a tour. After we had landed in a deep mud-bank with our boat, we balanced ourselves gracefully up into a beautiful palm-garden, and walked about for a half hour in what was once perhaps Eden, over bridges invented also in that age, and among a wild profusion of natural glory. The bridges were palm-trunks, about nine feet long, and slippery to an extreme, and as Jasmine was timid, I made her hold on to my skirt and counted



BUSRAH CANAL, PASSING DATE GROVES.

right, left, right, left, till we were over. Once across we looked at each other like two heroes, full of courage to go through still greater ordeals.

Thus we entered the village before us. My little handbag soon drew the attention of the people. I told them it contained medicine, at which magic word each discovered an ailment, and the door was opened. After we had seen and treated a number of sick we sat down in a clean mud-hut in the barn-yard of a poor farmer. After taking off my hat and bringing cool water for hands and face, they asked us to rest in the shade, while each ran to her task to prepare the meal for the strangers.

The people whom we had met along the road had spread the news of our coming and in flocked the lame, the blind, the halt and all afflicted with divers diseases, even those possessed. What a sight it was! How I realized my helplessness, for I knew the medicine would cure but few, might only relieve a few more, but would satisfy most. Such scenes of the East make the Bible history appear as if it had happened yesterday, and we see Christ standing thronged by the sick and soul-starved people. Also here in this little village was an opportunity to bid them drink of the fountain of life. Was it appreciated? Yes. We found willing listeners and responsive hearts to our talks. Naturally they are not able to grasp all that we tell them but we succeeded in making them understand how the Word of God was made incarnate, for most of them know from the Koran that Jesus is the Word.

While we rejoiced in our hearts at having so much freedom to speak, they began to tell us how much more we know than they, that we can read and write languages but that they have nothing but the daily drudgery without a break, without an elevating thought, knowing even of their own religion only so much as they are taught to repeat dumbly, but that our religion makes us good and wise. All this sounded like the outcry of an imprisoned soul. We were glad we had come for it seems it was not in vain, for now often some of the girls start at sunrise from the village and walk for hours to see and speak with us and urge us to come again soon. I really believe the yellow eye salve with which I so copiously anointed their eyes has acted on their hearts. The day is come when the Eastern woman no longer shuns the company of her Christian sister.

## AYESHA AT HOME.

BY \*LUSIEK ESHO.

When we compare the customs of the Arab women with the customs of us of Turkish birth, we observe a great difference.

1. With regard to salutations. When one meets another the first questions asked if it is morning, are: How have you morninged? How are you? How is your condition? How is your constitution? How is the manager of your household? How is your daughter? And your son? And your mother, and grandmother, and father? And the answers follow in quick succession:—Well, happy, as Allah wills, Praise to Allah, Allah give you peace, Allah satisfy you, etc., etc. etc., in endless round each in turn two or three times over, and to each question belongs its special reply.
2. With regard to the etiquette of calling. If the woman be of the middle class, or lower, she visits her people or her friends by day after she has completed her work. She takes her sewing with her and if it be morning she returns before noon to prepare the meal, or if afternoon she returns before sunset to prepare supper for her lord. But the women of the sheikhs and of the higher class never leave their houses except by night, for the purpose of visiting their relatives or friends, for it is regarded a great disgrace among them to appear by day. Only those of lower station visit these by day. To each visitor is presented coffee and Muscat sweets, or perhaps crisp bread fried in fat, or dates and sugar dainties. If the visitors be of the wealthy, or intimate, and if the visit be after a long interval, she is anointed with rose-water and incense is burned for her, and for all those present. Coffee is always ready with dates and various sweets, or perhaps an infusion of senna in place of tea.

If the woman be aged, even though of the sheikh's family, it is not regarded a disgrace to leave the house by day, though even then such a one is timid and ashamed of her boldness. If the visitor enters and a meal be ready and the women already around the platter, she must partake, for a failure to do so is regarded as a shame and a disgrace, be she never so satisfied, and would indicate enmity and a desire to offend her host. If the newcomer be from a distant place, and a close friend, she may remain, eating and drinking, eight or ten days, whereupon she is permitted to return to her home. So to all, be the hosts ever so rich or ever so poor.

The rich who have no work to do, spend much time in sleep, but the poorer are ceaselessly occupied with household duties, among

\* Lusiek is the wife of Mu'allim Elias, the Arabic teacher, and is a native of Mardin, Turkey.

which not the least is the bringing of water on their backs from the spring. Clothing to be washed is taken to the spring, and for soap they are vigorously rubbed in with mud, except the white clothes of the husband, which are honored with a bit of soap and cold water. Some wash the clothing in sea-water, regarding it as of greater cleansing power. Once a month they bathe at the spring, smearing their bodies first with Rifa mud and palm fiber. The former is cheaper than Katif mud, being about two cents for three pounds. Only the wealthy can afford the Katif mud, as it ranges from four to five cents for the same quantity, and has a sweeter odor, and becomes soft and frothy like butter. If one be afflicted with bowel trouble, this same mud is taken, strained through a cloth, of which resulting water the sick one drinks. Nor is this all the mud can do. After careful sifting, it is rubbed into the hair and wetted, and behold, a beautiful foam appears. The hair is dressed once a week, only on Fridays, when it is copiously smeared with fat or butter, and between each braid anointed with saffron water, and incense oil, or henna and myrtle juice, etc. Then the hair is divided, four braids in either side and eight in the rear, and on each braid are hung amulets and charms. If the woman be the second or third wife, at her turn she arrays herself in the choicest garments, dyes her feet and hands with henna, dons her gold and silver ornaments, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, anklets, nose-ring, and finger-rings, that if possible she may supplant her rivals in her husband's affections.

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### THE SEQUEL TO THE TRIBUTE.

Our last quarterly published an article which gave well-deserved credit to the native helpers of the Arabian Mission, our colporteurs and assistants. Let us look into their homes. Who is that busy little woman, surrounded by a group of children ranging in age from an infant to a boy of nine? She is the tireless mother, the anxious house-wife who has taken up a trade by which she may be able to help support the family of six. We hear her at sunrise, doing her washing, sewing on a hand-machine or preparing the food for the day, that she may be free later to attend to her sickly children, and to the sewing for which she expects a few cents. For the oil in the cruse is low and the flour but a handful and there are hungry mouths to fill.

Does she get discouraged? We hardly think so when we look at her bright, smiling face, laughing with her children. Whirrrrr goes the hand-machine. Now she bites off a thread, and again she places a

stitch, and in a trice, at the first sign of the visitor she goes preparing coffee, not heeding the protest, for hospitality is one of the greatest virtues in this country. The visitor wants a little practice in the language and again the little woman turns from her task and patiently goes over the difficult places with the student. And is this all?

Before the visitor leaves she tells her to come around on such a day, and she will be ready to introduce her into a new Arab home, and "bring your hymn-book," she says, "for they like singing." At the appointed day we find her ready, baby on one arm, Bible under the other, a hopeful clinging to her skirt. The people welcome her gladly as we enter the women's meeting-room, and after she has introduced her friend to rich and poor, she is asked to read from her book. With her native fluency of speech, and with a heart full of sympathy, acquired in life's hard school, she expounds the Word. I have seen people ask her time and again to come on a certain day when they may not be disturbed by idle questioners. How she rejoices on her way home to have knocked on the hearts of these light-seeking people. Now, surely, this is enough for a helper's wife to do. But, no.

It is about nine at night and she knows the Khatoun (lady) is



PASTOR GERJIS AND FAMILY — BAHREIN.

still studying. Almost noiselessly she slips upstairs to give the student an hour of undisturbed conversation, for the children are asleep and their father is with them. After she descends as noiselessly as she came and the bright light of her love and self-denial has shed its beams into the heart of her fellow-missionary. Brave wives of our colporteurs and helpers at the front, they bear the heat and the burden of the struggle as well as any of us and perhaps more so, for we live in comparative comfort.

God bless every one of them, and may prayers at home go up for them, as well as for the missionaries.



BAZAAR AT AMARA OUT-STATION ON THE TIGRIS, 150 MILES ABOVE BUSRAH.

## INLAND ARABIA—A FOOTHOLD FOR EVANGELISTIC WORK.

BY REV. JAMES CANTINE.

Travel in Eastern Arabia, so far as regards the native, is comparatively easy. Some survival of the world-famed reputation of the Arab for hospitality still makes it the custom for the local sheikhs to give entertainment to strangers. We are constantly making use of this in our mission touring, but at best it only provides for a limited stay of a day or two at one place, and there are obvious disadvantages to being continually under the observation of one's host. We have, therefore, for some time been seeking throughout our large field, opportunities for owning our own houses in the inland towns; and at Nachl, in Oman, purchased with the B.L.M.A.S grant, is the first of these permanent centres of evangelistic effort.

Nachl, meaning *date trees*, is the most central of the large cities of south-eastern Arabia, and the easiest to reach from Muscat. None of the narrow stifling valleys have to be followed nor the high rocky divides crossed, that make our donkey or camel travel in Oman so difficult. At the foot of a high range of mountains, where numerous and never-failing springs make possible its hundreds of terraced gardens, it looks out over twenty or thirty miles of gently-sloping plain, dotted here and there with the dark-green masses that betoken vegetation and villages, and stretching down to the sea itself. By it goes the most practicable road to the Green Mountains, 8,000 ft. high, to which our thoughts so often turn during our long burning summers.

The people of Nachl, as a whole, belong to neither of the great traditionally hostile factions of this region. Many of the wealthy families of Muscat have property and spend part of the summer there, and their nearness to the latter town has given most of them opportunity to see and in a measure become acquainted with the foreigner. All this has made us think this city the most approachable of any in Southern Arabia. And yet the Arab—but perhaps this is true of every race—has a deep-rooted antipathy to an alien owning land in his midst. The Sultan at Muscat has again and again prevented Christians from buying property in that town, and presumably would dislike in greater degree to see one of that religion settled inland beyond his daily oversight. As regards Nachl, it is only by a providential combination of circumstances and after years of gradually familiarizing the people with our purpose that we at last own our house there. When the first missionary journey was made, over ten years ago, the Christians had to sleep under a large tree outside the gate. After that we were received by the sheikh and given accommodation for a day or two each year. Then through the kindness

of a Persian merchant in Muscat, we used his house for longer visits. And at last our colporteur, after spending an entire summer in the above dwelling, could, through a close friendship with the brother of the ruling sheikh, set in motion the Oriental preliminaries necessary for such a bargain, and finally obtain possession of a very suitable little house on the outskirts of the town.

This foothold in Nachl has long been the desire of our hearts, and we now have stimulating us to further effort His signal proof of how God blesses careful, continuous, prayerful effort to the overcoming of great difficulties.

Last summer our colporteur with his family spent several months there; his Scripture sales were among the hundreds; we saw during a brief visit a fair and attentive audience gathered for a Sunday service, and from the number of Arabs constantly visiting the house we feel that these opportunities for acquainting the Moslems with Christian life and practice must do much towards preparing their hearts for the reception of Christian truth. The patrons of the Bible Lands Missions Aid Society, and the friends of evangelistic work among Moslems will rejoice with us in the gaining of this vantage point for the conquest of Arabia.—*From "The Star in the East."*

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